Introduction

In the broadest sense, personal narratives are natural gifts that unite cultures locally, nationally, and internationally. Narratives are generated in positive understanding of our identity, experiences, or our traditions. In order to continuously renew a better awareness of the present, and imagine a meaningful future, narratives are the communal bridges between people.

Those elements are true for any educational community, also. Narratives unveil who we are as faculty in relation to students, to our university colleagues, and to people in general. Each narrative that was gathered reflects a voice in the broader community of learners we encourage and support as educators and scholars.
What is Faculty Voices?

The Faculty Voices publication is an anthology of teaching narratives gathered from faculty across the disciplines. The goal of this narrative writing project is to stimulate exploration and understanding of the varied philosophies of teaching and learning evident in the university community. These introspections, reflections and recollections create a body of knowledge and a sustainable way of assessing our teaching and learning.

Writing, revising, and discussing the content of these narratives with like-minded faculty fosters meaningful metacognition about the roles that listening, speaking, reading, writing, problem-solving, research, assessment and technology play in advancing higher education.

Often, the stories about a faculty member's philosophy and beliefs about teaching and learning are guided by the larger mission of the university and those of the individual colleges. They emerge in connection with course catalogue descriptions, instructional goals and objectives as evidenced in the course syllabi, instructional strategies, integrated assessment efforts, and assignments that engage and involve students in a wide-range of projects, interactions and activities inside and outside the college classroom.

These narratives are our stories. They reflect who we are, what we believe about learning and student engagement, and how we perceive the vast opportunities that await us within the walls of the university classroom.
Acknowledgements

This Eighth volume of Faculty Voices was funded through the generous support from the Office of the Provost and the Office of Faculty Affairs and specific budget monies set aside for institutionalizing this project by the Faculty Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning.

Deep thanks go to the nine faculty members involved in this eighth year of this project related to telling our teaching stories. The many workshop hours spent together talking, creating, sharing, editing, revising and critiquing the collaborative work by this cluster of writers was a wonderful community building experience.

Special thanks are extended to Betsy Eudey, Paula Barrington-Schmidt, and Stephanie Paterson for serving as final manuscript reviewers. Their tireless efforts and salient comments helped make the publication and the individual stories even stronger and more compelling.

The unfailing support and professional assistance of Ms. Ximena Garcia, Administrative Coordinator of the Faculty Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning, is especially appreciated. Special thanks to Mr. Herb Smart from Communication & Public Affairs, for his assistance with graphics and formatting of this book.

Since the publication of the first volume, this project has become an outreach of the Faculty Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning. The purpose of the project is to extend and expand the scholarship of teaching and learning reflected in the 1990 writing of Ernest Boyer (Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professorate) through the process of writing and dialogue within a meaningful and supportive learning community.
An Overview of Faculty Voices

As we journey through life, each of us carries within us a composite of experiences that become a part of who we are, what we are, and how we respond. Those experiences comprise the “stories” of our life and of our profession as well. Each of us has a story to tell. The collection that follows is a volume of faculty “stories” about teaching, learning, assessment, engagement, and reflection about what makes a “teacher.”

The stories you will read are diverse, as are the individuals who crafted them and refined them for your reading pleasure. Some stories are abstract and philosophical, while others are concrete and based on events, experiences, interactions, or metaphors that fit our roles as teachers. Each type of writing, and each individual composition, has a purpose in helping us explore the vast intricacies of honoring teaching as both an art and a science.

We hope this Eighth volume of Faculty Voices will be followed by many more. It is important to develop a culture for telling our teaching “stories” in order to stimulate each of us on the university campus to further explore and examine the vital role we play in helping learning grow and blossom in our students.

Special thanks are offered to the nine faculty story “tellers” - reflecting a variety of disciplines from across the campus learning community - who, with vigor, passion, humor and collegial sharing, have extended this qualitative approach to examining their teaching methods, insights, and outcomes by sharing their faculty voices.

Dr. Betsy Eudey, Director,

Faculty Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning
Table of Contents

Teaching Wars, Episode V: Unfunded Mandates Strike Back ................................................................. 11
Donna Andrews and Brandon Sternod

Wise Tolerance for Linguistic Diversity ................................................................................................. 14
Teresa Bargetto-Andrés

It Will be Used Against You ................................................................................................................... 16
Christopher De Vries

A Course Gone Awry ............................................................................................................................. 19
Betsy Eudey

I Have Tourette's of the Pen ..................................................................................................................... 26
Taylor Marcell

Put on Your Boots and Teach! Teachers, Using Their Collective Power, can Make Inroads to Real Education for Students in Today's Classrooms ................................................................. 31
Christopher Roe

The Many Phases of Teaching and Learning ......................................................................................... 34
Viji Sundar

Teaching Democracy in Action .............................................................................................................. 37
Michael Warren Tumolo
The unprecedented reduction of the California State University budget for the 2009-10 academic year has had a major impact on pedagogical practices system-wide. This budget reduction has taken a devastating toll on the CSU, Stanislaus Department of Teacher Education in general and, more specifically, the Single Subjects Credential Program (SSCP). As members of the SSCP faculty, we have both been part of difficult discussions regarding the classes we can offer, the units we are willing to work, and the support we can provide to our student teachers in the field. In what follows, we provide some background on the problem and describe the decision making model (Professional Learning Communities) our program used to generate creative solutions to these challenges. We also reflect on the feedback we have received from our students in response to our decisions and the ramifications such decisions may have on the future of our program.

**Background of the Problem**

Late in the spring of 2009, our department was informed that we would have to cut over 10% of our budget for the upcoming academic year and that, as a result, we would lose most if not all of our part-time faculty. In the past, we have relied heavily on our “part-timers” for both teaching courses and supervising student teachers and interns in local secondary schools. After reconfiguring our budget, we realized that our program would have to undergo drastic changes to survive. Cutting classes and part-timers would not be enough. We would also have to rethink how to support for our students in the field.

In the past, student teachers and interns alike were observed by a University Supervisor (usually, a faculty member or retired secondary teacher/administrator) a total of ten times over the span of two semesters. For student teachers in particular, the model involved four visits in the first semester and six visits in the second semester. In the first semester, students were responsible for observing and assisting a master teacher for two periods a day and working one-on-one with an English Learner and a student with special needs. In the second semester, they become the lead instructor of a secondary classroom for two to three periods a day, five days a week. University Supervisors earned one-quarter unit for each first semester student teacher they observed and one-half unit for each second semester student teacher. So, for instance, 100 student teachers would equate to 25 units worth of compensation for the first semester and 50 units for the second. With the projected budget we were provided, it was obvious that something had to change.

**Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)**

Since one of the goals of the Teacher Education Department is to get our teacher candidates to critically analyze teaching and learning, we believed the framework for Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) would create an environment that would facilitate both budgetary and pedagogical solutions. PLCs work collaboratively to focus on learning instead of teaching and hold themselves accountable to answering the following three core questions: 1) What do we want each student to learn? 2) How will we know when each student has learned it? and 3) How will we respond when a student experiences difficulty in learning? (DuFour, 2004)

In the fall of 2008, several SSCP faculty members formed a PLC in order to address these three core questions and to challenge teachers to focus on their own learning and the learning of their students. Prior to the budgetary reductions, the Single Subject PLC agreed to pilot a new format for our student teachers’ first semester field experiences in the spring of 2009. We developed a different conceptual framework in response to the feedback from our former students who wanted more help identifying effective differentiated instruction strategies for English language learners and students with special needs. In addition, we provided professional development opportunities...
to enhance our current students’ teacher preparedness. A log sheet was created that our students used to track their time engaged in these educational experiences. This log sheet served as a uniform method to document the students’ time in the field and to communicate with us about their experiences. Based on the positive feedback we received from students, master teachers, and school administrators, the pilot was deemed to be a success.

When the budgetary reduction became a reality the following fall, we were forced to trim down our supervision model and decided to implement the pilot program-wide. In addition to the log sheets, we concluded that students would benefit from interacting with experts in the field in informative educational forums. In the old model, first semester student teachers worked with a master teacher in the field for 165 hours and were observed four times by a university supervisor. In this new model, students would now have a more diverse array of tasks to complete and four educational forums were implemented to replace field supervision. The credential candidates would observe their master teacher and other teachers in their content area, especially those who excel at differentiated instruction, for a total of 99 hours in the classroom. They would also be required to spend 22 hours directly observing/working with English learners and 22 hours directly observing/working with students with special needs. Finally, we would require them to spend another 22 hours completing supplemental tasks such as participating in professional development workshops, going to faculty meetings, and attending extra-curricular activities. All of these combined activities, while different than the traditional model, would still equate to 165 hours of field experiences.

Each of the four forums would have a specific theme and each student would be expected to attend at least three forums during the semester. To save money, all guest speakers would be participate on a voluntary basis and would financially compensated for their time. The first session would be a mandatory introduction to first semester student teaching where we outline our expectations and provide opportunities for new student teachers to interact with and learn what to expect from second semester student teachers. The second session would be a workshop on improvisation and thinking on your feet led by theater professor Dr. John Mayer. The third session would be about making lesson plan adaptations for English learners led by Rita Murphy, former CSUS part-time instructor and local high school teacher. And the fourth and final session would be led by Charlie Schroeder, another former part-timer and local high school educator, and would involve making lesson plan adaptations for students with special needs. In addition to preparing the credential candidates for their second semester student teaching, our plan would also provide them with experiences they could put to good use on their Teacher Performance Assessments (TPAs), an unfunded mandate from the California Council on Teacher Credentialing (CCTC) that all students must pass, along with their coursework, in order to become fully credentialed teachers.

Making it Happen: Putting the PLC Work into Action

The first session took place one week after the start of the fall semester. Despite the late notice, all but one of our student teachers were in attendance. We reviewed the syllabus and the log sheet with the students, introduced them to the second semester student teachers who had been gracious enough to agree to share their experiences, and dispersed them into groups by content area. In these groups, the second semester student teachers led discussions regarding what they might expect in the field, explained how to manage their time, and shared tips for passing the TPAs. Although the session was only scheduled for an hour and a half, many stayed longer to ask questions, exchange contact information, and to learn more about what it means to be a student teacher.

One week later, the second session was held on the main stage of the theater building with 23 students in attendance. Dr. Mayer facilitated the entire session with virtually no assistance from us. Although we originally planned the session as a lesson on thinking on your feet as a teacher, Dr. Mayer took a different approach. We moved around a lot, made silly noises and did unusual things, and got to know one another just a little bit better. His idea was to demonstrate ways our credential candidates could use theater-inspired activities to break the ice, relieve group tension, and develop community in the classroom.

The third session took place at the end of October in a more traditional classroom setting, this time with 43 students present. Ms. Murphy had previously taught a year-long pedagogy course for our program, so she was well versed on the needs of our students. Her talk mainly consisted of explaining the psychological needs of English learners and demonstrating the work English learners can do when we not only meet their learning needs but begin to rethink our methods of assessment. An added benefit of her presentation was a sample lesson she arranged to be modeled by one of our very own second semester
interns. Despite being a relative novice herself, this intern aptly demonstrated how putting Specially Designed Academic Instruction in English (SDAIE) strategies into practice can be both practical and effective.

The fourth and final session was held in mid-November. Mr. Schroeder led a discussion on working with special needs students. This session was more heavily-weighted toward questions and answers rather than lecture and/or activities. Luckily, the students had plenty of questions about working with students who posed special educational challenges, and Mr. Schroeder’s decades worth of insight and experience proved to be a valuable resource for practical strategies.

**What the Students Had to Say**

The students were grateful for the diversity of the forum topics and the freedom to choose those most applicable to their professional development needs. There were even some students who attended all four forum sessions, not just the required three. The most populated forum was the special needs workshop. We asked our guest speaker, Charlie Schroeder, to engage in a more interactive question and answer format. The students were extremely positive about the chance to ask specific questions that were helpful in addressing the Teacher Performance Assessments (TPAs). One of the students who attended this forum said, “Now I know what IEP [Individual Education Plan] and other terms are.” Another student expressed interest in the topic but wanted “a chance to hear someone with experience from within our content area.” The English learner forum received high evaluation scores. Students were encouraged with the strategies presented in the workshop. One student commented on how much he gained from Rita Murphy’s extensive background working with English learners and said “all of the lessons she conveyed to us were incredibly helpful and I now have so many great strategies for ELL [English Language Learners] students.” Students were extremely happy with our intern’s presentation and said, “It was nice to have examples from a high school teacher who just started teaching ELLs.” The theater forum received enthusiastic reviews where students felt energized and engaged in the presentation. One student said that John Mayer “was really great – helped me to better understand how to develop skills in making teaching more theatrical.”

**What It All Means**

As we enter the second semester of the forum series, we are once again faced with another consequence from the budget reduction that we did not anticipate. Due to the confusion over whether or not we were going to accept new students into the credential program for the spring of 2010, we lost half of our targeted enrollment and needed to rethink the forum concept in our PLCs. We decided to offer new forum topics on Monday nights for both first and second semester credential candidates. These topics will address gang related issues, bullying in the schools, and using cooperative learning strategies for English language learners and students with special needs. In addition, even though we saved a substantial amount of money by eliminating first semester field supervision, we agreed that the absence of any university personnel in the first semester does not allow for proactive troubleshooting during the field practicum and it portrays an unfortunate misconception that the university does not care about their credential candidates.

The forums did provide our PLC with a shared focus and an opportunity to evaluate our curriculum as practitioners. We joined together as faculty to establish common goals for student learning, we surveyed the students themselves regarding what they learned, and we adjusted our future forums to meet the ever-changing needs of our students. However, it is virtually impossible to provide our students with a quality education with perpetually dwindling resources. It is possible for us as a program to define what we value in education and request that these values be fiscally supported by the CSU system. It must be stated, however, that due to our commitment to our students and in light of the furloughs, we did in fact bend to the pressure of the administration and voluntarily agreed to do more work for less money. While this decision allowed us to meet the immediate needs of our credential candidates, we worry about the long term consequences this may have on our program. Will we continue to be expected to do more with less? When do such demands become unreasonable and future cuts become untenable? And at what point will we be doing our students a disservice by spreading ourselves so thin?

---

**Bibliography**


Alfonso X the Wise, thirteenth-century king of Castile and León (what would form part of Spain two centuries later) was instrumental in the creation, growth, documentation, and evolution of the Spanish language. The king’s crucial role in promoting the use of the Castilian vernacular, which resulted in establishing the Spanish language, led to the creation of a “standard Castilian or Spanish,” synonymous terms for what would become the official language of more than twenty modern nations. The Castilian vernacular, the language of Alfonso X and his collaborators, soon rose to be the prestigious variety. It should not be assumed, however, that the king was unaware that variant terms served as a medium to expand and enrich the language, “en el nuestro lenguage de Castiella unos le dizen PORTAL otros CLAUSTRA, & digal cada uno como quisiere ca todo es bueno.” (“In our Castilian language, some say GATE, others DOOR, and each person can say whichever, since both are acceptable”). Even for those of us proficient in any variety of modern Spanish, it can be challenging to understand and interpret, according to our Modern standards, Alfonso’s extraordinarily wise words inked over 700 years ago.

This interpretation of descriptive language informs the way I teach Spanish linguistics courses to our students at CSU Stanislaus. Our students in the Spanish Program, the majority of whom are native Spanish speakers, have somewhere, somehow been made to believe that variant terms served as a medium to expand and enrich the language, “en el nuestro lenguage de Castiella unos le dizen PORTAL otros CLAUSTRA, & digal cada uno como quisiere ca todo es bueno.” (“In our Castilian language, some say GATE, others DOOR, and each person can say whichever, since both are acceptable”). Even for those of us proficient in any variety of modern Spanish, it can be challenging to understand and interpret, according to our Modern standards, Alfonso’s extraordinarily wise words inked over 700 years ago.

The terms “standard” and “sub-standard” speech are ambiguous. In the field of linguistics, “standard” terms, the prestigious variety, are established by extra-linguistic forces, accidentally, and not necessarily by any intrinsic value of the terms themselves. Moreover, what is considered standard in one variety of Spanish is often sub-standard in another. There are those who believe that sub-standard Spanish is merely an imperfectly learned approximation to real Spanish, differing from it because the speakers are ignorant and do not follow the rules. To those familiar with the fields of linguistics and languages, however, sub-standard Spanish is a variety of Spanish spoken by natives of the language with its own rules and patterns. Noam Chomsky, arguably the leading linguist on theoretical language acquisition, explains that the native speaker’s performance, often sub-standard because of errors, does not properly reveal one’s implicit knowledge of the language. Additionally, linguists Campbell and Wales state that one’s knowledge in understanding and speaking the language is expressly more important than the speaker’s grammatical competence. May it be understood that I am not a proponent of linguistic inaccuracy; rather I have ascertained by my teaching of thousands of native Hispanic students, whose speaking patterns may be traced to both immigration and generations of social isolation, that the students will learn much more effectively if they are applauded for their bilingualism while being introduced to the full gamut of language registers, indeed an important part of being an educated speaker, rather than being chastised for not knowing “standard” Spanish.

Roberto (a fictitious name) arrived last week to my office for his advising appointment. “Hola Profesora...” and before I could respond, he proceeded almost with embarrassment to express as fact, “Mi español no es muy bueno....” Apparently, Roberto had no idea that millions of educated, monolingual speakers around the world spend a substantial amount of their lives and fortunes in the hopes of achieving bilingualism. My goal in teaching is to make Roberto and his contemporaries aware of slight discrepancies of standard and sub-standard Spanish and to signal to Roberto to become aware of his very impressionistic, subjective, and erroneous opinions about language. My teaching bridges Roberto’s language variant to prescriptive language, as I set the groundwork for him to analyze why certain utterances are considered “sub-standard,” and, hence, less prestigious from a social stand-point (e.g., fábrica de conservas rather than canería, or el campo rather than el fil, or pasar la aspiradora rather
than vacuумiar). My instruction to Roberto and his peers is not trivial, and it includes informing students of overt negative perceptions of a language that is perhaps most familiar to them. My teaching, however, is a matter of displaying respect for the students’ variety and differs substantially from the more traditional method of an endless process of error correction and repetition. I provide the means for students to attain a precise understanding of the nature of language change, and to expand their understanding of a language norm and the reasons of its acceptability, albeit arbitrary. I introduce them to the 2005 Diccionario de dudas, which includes thousands of entries for which the Royal Academy of the Spanish language offers a variety of different acceptable possibilities, including standard or sub-standard renditions.

Self-worth: In order to speak as an authority on the Spanish language, I alert my students that I believe each student is unique, has equal worth, and can be a successful learner. I strive to teach with honesty and integrity in order to earn the students’ trust in our discussion of language learning. My expectations are high because I believe it is the best way for our students to yield greater levels of performance. On-going communication with my colleagues regarding our program’s mission and goals, as well as student learning goals/objectives is fundamental in order to ensure that my teaching reinforces my colleagues’ teachings and vice-versa. This same partnership must also be established with our students. I make every effort to maintain a high level of visibility in the university to encourage informal and formal contact with students.

Determination: In order that students achieve their full potential, I often remind them that their motivation, hard work, and persistence are the most important factors for success. I strive to inspire our students by providing quality education inside and outside of the classroom so that their lives are enriched and their opportunities expanded. I work well beyond the call of duty with a serious dedication to a multicultural approach to teaching and expend great effort to expand the horizons of all of our students. I take full advantage of our language classes to ensure students’ understanding of our culturally diverse community and ever-changing global society; likewise, I provide opportunities for students to provide service to others (e.g., translations for the community, student led study groups, dissemination of their research), in order that they thrive as students and become responsible members of their communities.

Relevance: My long-standing interest in languages tightly fits my professional goal of making learning relevant and meaningful. Translation moments that were magical to me as a child have enormously shaped the person I am. Teaching the Spanish language, linguistics, and Italian stem beyond a professional aspiration; for as long as I can remember, I have had a fascination with languages. I recognized early on the similarities in the Romance languages as my father taught me about the Italy he had never really left behind. I believe that it is through my culturally and linguistically diverse life that I am able to better understand the immigrant roots of the largest majority of our students in our program; recognition of whom our students are leads me to a greater sense of purpose in my dedication to them.

Quality: I strive to treat each student fairly and equally, and elicit the participation of everyone so that I achieve my fundamental teaching objectives which include: 1) providing opportunities to speak, listen, write, and read the target language, 2) laying the groundwork for an analysis of the target language, 3) allowing for an understanding of diverse cultural perspectives, 4) engaging the students in critical thinking, 5) highlighting various opinions, 6) allowing for a new interpretation to familiar and unfamiliar material, 7) supplying means to formulate an opinion, 8) relating the material to one’s life, and 9) setting the foundation for life-long learning.

Assessing my own teaching leads me to the most difficult question of all, “Why does teaching matter to me?” What started as a childhood interest, my deep appreciation of language has been unaltered as far as conceptualizing it in a non-hierarchical manner; I lead the students, but it is they who allow me to reflect and grow. Each class poses different complexities and opportunities, challenging me to perceive significant classroom subtleties, including my presence, their presence, their written work, their formal presentations, their informal and formal assessment of learning, and their unarticulated knowledge. In finding the link between standard and sub-standard speech, I find a way to demonstrate to our students my tolerance for linguistic diversity and to let them know that I am an ardent supporter of bilingualism. While popular culture may not support a standard variety, nor recognize the importance of perceiving speech registers, such a pernicious attitude to language neither reflects, nor respects, our students’ gift. As students sense my commitment to language analysis, I hope that each finds through his or her native language a renewed sense of self-worth, determination, relevance, and quality, and that they are sensitized to the extraordinary relevance of language. Such a reinvigoration, may contribute to their children learning a second language effortlessly from birth.
1 Settling In

I had tried calling my wife several times as it grew late in the afternoon. My astronomy final would start soon, and I was still home taking care of our children who were both three at the time. Earlier that year we had traveled across the country, leaving behind friends, family, and colleagues, so my wife could take a tenure track position at this university, where we knew no one and where on this early summer afternoon it was quite hot, and I would soon be quite late.

My wife and I met in graduate school, married as we were working on doctoral dissertations, and began working on our careers and our family right after earning our Ph.Ds. I felt my career was a noble calling, on one hand to extend the frontiers of human knowledge of the Universe, and on the other hand to spread the skills of critical inquiry that helped secure that knowledge to the young men and women at the university. I also felt a calling to be a loving father and to raise children who marveled at the world around us.

I obtained a postdoctoral fellowship, my wife began as an instructor in Massachusetts, and we had two children. As my postdoc and my wife’s adjunct position drew to a close in Cambridge, we had few prospects. My wife had several interviews for tenure track jobs, but I had trouble getting even another postdoc offer. I was not the only one having trouble; many of my colleagues who were applying for astronomy positions were having similar frustrations. Even colleagues with extraordinary qualifications were having a tough time finding work. The market was tight, and jobs were hard to come by. When my wife received the offer to come to CSU Stanislaus, we were glad to finally have some prospect for the future, so we took it. We figured that I could find something to do, and we ended up coming at a fortunate time. The astronomer at CSU Stanislaus was working half-time as part of the early retirement program, so I immediately found work as a lecturer in the department. I was also lucky that UC Merced had shortsightedly given most of their physics faculty time off to establish their research programs when they first opened to students, so I found myself teaching their inaugural physics class.

We moved across the country, found a house, a wonderful daycare, and settled into a very busy working schedule. We both threw ourselves into teaching and tried to maintain our research at some level. It wasn’t too long until we were both teaching night classes, and had less time for the children, for friends, and for each other. We both dedicated ourselves to running rigorous classes, the type we remembered at our undergraduate institutions and in graduate school. It did not matter that we had a far higher workload than our professors at those institutions, and that we were working without graduate students to grade or teach sections for us. We owed it to the students at this University to try to give them the same type of class a traditional liberal arts student might receive. So the hours we dedicated to work stretched well beyond forty per week to at least eighty for each of us.

2 Isolation

I called one of my wife’s colleagues who also had children who were roughly the same age as my daughters, hoping I could find someone to watch them at the last minute, but I couldn’t find anyone to help. Determined to get to my final in time, I packed an array of snacks and activities, which I hoped would occupy my daughters for the exam, and we stepped out into the warm day to begin what would be a long walk to campus.

By the end of the first year the stress was intensifying. I was irritable and would have frequent arguments with my young children and wife. My wife and I decided we needed time alone together each week so we began hiring a babysitter every Sunday. It wasn’t long before this transformed into additional time we could use at the University to prepare for classes. I also felt constant guilt that our children were attending daycare full time, two nights a week I was away teaching class, and on Sunday we were both now away from noon until four. Still my time spent working never seemed to be enough. I was always trying to catch up with grading, and research was nearly
impossible. During the summer, I found that I would try to cram ten months of research into two months. After the summer, I would return to teaching exhausted.

Still, there were successes. After two years as a lecturer, I managed to get a tenure track appointment. My wife and I managed to scrape together funds and receive a few small grants which allowed us to attend and present at conferences. I received a small time allotment for research in my first year at the University, allowing me the time to write some major grant proposals to the National Science Foundation and NASA. We also believed the promise from our Provost, Deans, and President that a workload reduction was coming, and I figured things would get easier when I had a few years under my belt. My wife and I found a house far from campus in an area that reminded us more of the northeast, and we tried to make this house a retreat from campus life. Looking back on it, I think the reason I wanted a house so far from campus was to make the weekend trips to work stop, to separate my family life more fully from my work, and indulge more in time with my daughters.

I shouldn’t have been surprised that we reached a crisis in our marriage. We had drifted apart for quite some time, and it was easy to ignore each other with all the demands of the University and our children. We were isolated, from each other, from our friends back east, from our families, and our colleagues were just as busy as we were. We found ourselves with little support, trying to both raise children and work eighty hour work weeks. Quite frankly, it turned out to be impossible for us.

It was the end of my first year on the tenure track, and I had just received my first grant from the National Science Foundation. My teaching evaluations were good, and I was liked by my students, but I felt like a miserable failure to those most important to me: my children, and my wife.

3 The New Deal

My girls and I had slowly walked to campus for fifteen minutes when a colleague from my wife’s department returned my call. Ten minutes later she pulled her car up next to me, ready to take care of my girls and drive me to my exam.

I resolved not to work beyond sixty hours a week. We no longer hired a babysitter on Sundays and, instead, resolved to spend more time either as a family or socializing with friends. I tried to stop putting so much effort into teaching that I neglected my family. I worked to reduce the amount of grading I had and to streamline my classes so that I could get the maximum impact from the hours I did work. I was happier and more engaged with my family, and I worked hard to leave the frustrations of work at work.

Unfortunately, things would get more stressful. My wife was denied tenure. In shock, she failed to meet a deadline and lost her ability to appeal. Had we not started addressing problems in our marriage sooner, I am sure that this blow would have ended it. I, too, found it difficult to carry on both my teaching and research and found that I would have to abandon my most ambitious research plans. Then came the budget crisis, and the raises we were counting on to help us afford our new house turned into furloughs. It looked as though all our hard work was for nothing, but I believe that there is a valuable lesson to be learned in this. A lesson which I will carry with me into my future career.

4 Callings

In the end what made my work possible was getting to know a few friends around the University, an atmosphere of collegiality which is increasingly difficult to foster as our personal time is increasingly impinged upon by mounting work and pressure. Another crisis was averted at the last minute.

Many faculty, myself included, see teaching as a calling. A noble profession of shaping the minds of the future. This is dangerous thinking. Our jobs are just that, jobs. It should be clear after this year of financial devastation that the University does not care about our calling. The University works to maximize its efficiency and minimize the state dollars expended on each student. Our dedication to providing the best education possible to these students is constantly used against us. We work harder and more than we should. We take additional assignments on a volunteer basis and fill our classes beyond capacity in an effort to serve the students the best we can. Unfortunately, this selflessness is rewarded only by further increases in workload and class size as we prove once again that we can work more efficiently, even if the quality of that work begins to suffer, or, more likely, the quality of our lives further deteriorates. Eventually this cycle will only result in a slow deterioration of the quality of the education we provide. We need to stop martyring ourselves and treat this work not as a calling, even if we feel that it is, but as a job. Only then can we stop the slow erosion of educational quality that has already begun.

I have no happy ending to this story, only a warning. Your dedication to your profession, to the students, to this campus, your drive to do the best you can, your willingness to take up the slack as budgets are cut, will be used against you. It will be used against
your family. It will be used against your friends. You have the right to say “no.” You have the right to see your job as a noble pursuit, but not one which requires you to sacrifice your relationships or your life.
Shock or disbelief. Denial. Bargaining. Guilt. Anger. Depression. Acceptance and hope. These seven stages of grief seem to reflect well the stages I went through this year while teaching a course gone awry. I would at times augment these stages with detours into embarrassment, horror, sadness, self-deprecation, deflection, and resignation, but these feelings are more related to my own ego management than to coping with grief. I, and many of my students, experienced several kinds of losses because of the way this course unfolded: lost learning opportunities, lost engagement, lost support, lost passion. At times it didn’t feel like a total loss, but as if we were getting by when flourishing might have been possible. For someone like me, who believes so strongly in the value of education and feels morally obligated to support all students, even a diminished learning experience feels like a failure. Now that I’m working with acceptance and hope, I’m trying to identify the conditions and choices that may have contributed to undermining the quality of this course, and to determine what I might do differently in the future.

July-September: Status Quo

I began preparing in July for my Fall 2009 online section of Gender and Education. In addition to serving students in Gender Studies, the class supports Liberal Studies students and is included in the General Education program. The success and growth of my program has depended upon offering general education (GE) courses that can attract students to the discipline and lead them into the minor or major. My program has been able to offer lower-enrolled courses for the students in the minor and major because we offer these higher-enrolled GE courses. We have also been able to reach students who are often excluded from educational opportunities by offering courses online. I had taught this course the prior spring and was able to draw upon student feedback to make adjustments for Fall 2009. I had also been learning much about online pedagogies and the means to engage online students, and I was adjusting the course to incorporate best practices in online instruction.

I redesigned the course assignments to include participation in online conversations about the current and upcoming unit via a small-group discussion board; posting of responses to questions I posed and to classmate comments via a full-class discussion board; engagement in a group project related to course topics; and an interview project that could be completed as an essay, presentation, or video. These activities were intended to support consistent communication and relationship-building among the students and myself, activate prior knowledge and application of information to lived experiences, support critical thinking about course topics, and allow students to demonstrate understanding in a variety of formats in support of a range of learning styles.

In each unit I posted an introduction to the unit topic, an overview of the unit readings/videos with study questions for each item, topics for the discussion postings, topics for the small-group conversations, information about course projects, and a unit checklist. I expected to respond to at least one discussion post by each student each week and to have grades posted within four days of the end of each weekly unit. This was the only course I would be teaching due to reassigned time for administrative duties, so I felt I could handle the workload for unit development and grading even with fifty students enrolled in the course.

In mid-August, however, my workload was suddenly increased when I agreed to teach an additional course in fall. Budget cuts led to the non-reappointment of a part-time faculty member in my program, which meant that three gender studies courses were going to be cut from the fall schedule even though each had enrollments of forty or more students. By teaching an additional fall course, I was helping students to progress toward graduation, especially those in the major and minor. I knew it would be taxing to take on the new course, but thought it was in the best interests of the students and program to do so. As the Director of the Faculty...
Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning and the Clerk of the Academic Senate, I had many other obligations in the fall, but I convinced myself that taking on the extra class was necessary to support students.

When the fall term began in September, I was energized by the students in both classes and excited to share the semester with them. The new term also brought heightened stress from concerns about the current and future campus budget and the possibility of program discontinuation and a change to the academic calendar. The start of a semester is always busy, so I was used to disarray, but this fall seemed more emotionally and intellectually taxing than any prior year. I remained optimistic, however, as a new academic year brings opportunities for growth and change.

**September 29: Shock/Disbelief**

By the end of the third week of classes, I was feeling overwhelmed by my courses (and my work on the Academic Senate). I was spending much more time than I had budgeted for reading and responding to the postings made by students, monitoring student engagement in their group activities, reminding students of course expectations, responding to email and face to face inquiries by students, and helping students to address issues unrelated to the course. I reminded myself that I usually feel a bit scattered early in every term, and that I had always been able to develop a more manageable routine as the term progressed. I expected that some of the reason I was feeling overwhelmed by my courses was because my non-teaching work was also taking more time and emotional energy than usual. I often wondered if my sense of overload was not because of the classes I was teaching, but because of other demands on my time. I decided to start keeping a log of my time to track workload, and in only three days had logged 20 hours for work related to Gender and Education. The total hours spent engaged in campus-related work was staggering.

When planning ahead, I try to make good choices, but I sometimes make bad decisions that I justify based on a desire to help students. Recognizing that many students were having difficulties obtaining enough courses to be enrolled full-time, or to make swift progress to graduation, I also admitted students to each course beyond the posted enrollment capacity. I knew from prior experience that the capacities already seemed high given the types of learning experiences I had developed for the courses, but it’s much easier for me to intellectualize refusing to add a student than to actually turn down a student who has a desire to learn.

Not only did I over-enroll the courses, but several of the students added after the start of the term, including two who joined during the third week. I thought I had sound reasons for adding these students, but I failed to adequately take into account the impact of late admissions on these and the other students. There is a perception by students and some advisors that online classes are often “easier” to add late because all information shared with students is captured in the course management system, and thus many students were advised to seek a late add to Gender and Education when they were unable to enroll in other courses. This meant that many of the late adds were students seeking units, and not necessarily interested in the course topic or prepared for engagement in an online class.

Unfortunately, my desire to “help” by adding students late may in fact have limited the educational experience for all students in the course. Regardless of delivery method, Kathleen Gabriel (2008) strongly discourages late adds, noting, “during the first few class meetings – not just the first day – we meet our students, share with them who we are, present course goals, reveal intended learning outcomes, spell out class expectations, and set up ground rules” (p. 25). She indicates that “at risk” students especially need to be involved in these introductory activities, and those seeking to add courses late often meet the definition of “at risk.” Students who are not involved from the beginning may miss out on important socializing activities that promote engagement, often fail to understand the purposes behind specific assignments, and can cause disruptions to others as they attempt to learn expectations. They also typically have to complete missed coursework at a more rapid pace than their on-time classmates, and thus may not have had adequate time to deeply learn foundational concepts presented early-on, thus setting them up for challenges for the remainder of the term. In addition to these typical challenges, because Gender and Education required group work throughout the term, those who added late also caused disruption in these groups.

Of course, the challenges I was facing were not only due to late adds, but to a course design that required each student to make a total of twelve posts to the course website each week (four that are 150-200 words, eight that are around 100 words). For students the workload isn’t overwhelming, especially since they are not required to read all posts made by all classmates. On the other hand, I do have to read every post, and with the 60 students I allowed to
enroll, that was 720 posts (I don’t even want to calculate the number of words) every week if each student was fully engaged. As with any course, there were even some students who made more posts than were required, going above and beyond the call to enhance their own learning experience. I was shocked to find myself wishing they would stop being so engaged, and at times even hoped that all students wouldn’t complete their assigned posts so I would have less to read. The structure of small group conversations and full-class discussion follows best practices for student engagement in large (over 25 student) online courses, and the discussions did lead to really interesting and thoughtful interaction among the students. It was exciting to read their posts, and I became engrossed in their ideas. Reading their submissions stirred my passion for teaching and learning, but, as I became pressed for time, it lost some of its luster.

I had promised to respond to at least one post per student per week, and needed to thoughtfully select which submissions or topics most benefited from my participation. Of course there were many times that I needed or wanted to respond to many more posts than just one per student to expand understanding, ask for clarification, correct misinformation, celebrate strong work, and reinforce course norms. Opening links, reading student work, considering their ideas alongside other posts, typing responses, and submitting my posts took much more time than I had hoped. I could not stay on top of things, for within hours (sometimes minutes) of reading all that had been posted, dozens of new submissions had been made. I was getting it all done, but I was exhausted and couldn’t believe that I hadn’t gotten into a groove for the term. I tried to enact strategies for efficient and effective grading (setting designated times for grading, setting a timer to prevent myself from lingering on one post too long, identifying themes that could be addressed in full-class announcement rather than via several individual posts) and hoped for the best.

October 23: Denial

By the seventh week of the term my body had given up. I was tired, congested, coughing, and just couldn’t quite focus on my computer screen. I had all unit information available on the course website, but I hadn’t posted grades for the prior unit and hadn’t read all of the new posts to the discussion boards. The worst of the illness struck on a furlough day, but I didn’t emerge renewed and refreshed, just further behind. I posted an announcement letting students know of my illness and the delay in submitting grades, so they wouldn’t worry if they didn’t feel my presence.

I tried to convince my students and myself that being sick was the reason I was behind. Being sick was expected in the H1N1 era. I honestly was sick, but I got other work completed on time. I had made an unconscious, but real, choice to privilege other work-related tasks over finalizing grades and reading new student posts for Gender and Education. I tried to convince myself that as soon as I was healthier I’d be able to get caught up (maybe even ahead). I wasn’t recognizing that I was beginning to become distanced from my students in this distance education course. While they were making demands on me in the form of discussion posts, their demands felt less immediate than those raised by students in my face to face class and colleagues with whom I interacted on campus. I responded immediately to student emails, phone calls, and office visits, but wasn’t treating the submitted student work with the same urgency. I was a bit behind in grading in my face-to-face class as well, and the students weren’t expressing concern. I chose to believe that it didn’t matter in the online course either. I knew better, but tried to convince myself it was okay to make myself feel better about my actions.

My delay in grading was easier to address in a face to face course, however. While I tried to convince myself that students were feeling my presence and voice via the Unit materials, this is only one-way communication. Had I presented this same information in a classroom setting, students would have had a chance to interact with me even if it wasn’t connected to assessment of materials they submitted for grading. The unit materials posted on the website are often experienced as an extension of the course readings, not as a means of connection to an instructor. Perhaps if portions of this material had been presented by me in video or audio format it would have felt more personal, but I hadn’t provided information in these formats due to concerns about student internet speeds (video files take much longer to load) and the time involved creating and posting accessible video and audio files. I told myself that students were getting a lot of “me” through the universal posts to the class, and tried to discount the loss I was feeling from not having daily/regular interaction with the students. However, for online students, the discussion board and grade book are two areas where students obtain individualized attention from a professor and where the professor can really feel engaged with students. I could deny the likely negative impact on students when the disconnection was viewed as a temporary condition due to illness, but it was harder to believe as it persisted.
October 29: Bargaining and Guilt

I wasn’t fully healthy, but had gotten over the worst of my illness. Unit Seven had ended, and I had barely looked at the discussion posts. This unit included topics that were particularly important to me, and I hadn’t shared in the students’ discovery process as they responded to the questions I posed and to the comments made by classmates. There was lively interaction among the students, but I wasn’t part of the conversation. I felt like an outsider in my own course. I posted to the course website an open letter to my students. It read, in part,

I am feeling really lousy about my lack of participation in this course over the past week. As indicated elsewhere, I was very sick for several days and... in moments when I was feeling competent to work, I had many pressing deadlines for campus-based work and de-prioritized reviewing discussion posts. I regret not being engaged in your discussions during Unit Seven, and apologize for my absence...

But I will admit that one of the reasons I de-prioritized grading for this class is because (a) you had access to the course material and have already demonstrated skills at understanding the content without a lot of prompting from me; and (b) over the last several units you have also demonstrated a strong ability to provide feedback to one another on course topics....

And there is also a much bigger reason why I am behind in my teaching and course prep. I have been putting an enormous amount of energy and a good deal of time into addressing campus-wide issues that I think are in the short and long term going to negatively impact the quality of education at this institution. I teach this course because I am convinced that formal schooling is one of the primary means by which we socialize children and young adults. I believe that education is a right, and a public good. I believe that what we teach, what we choose not to teach, how we teach, and the environment in which teaching occurs all reflect and reinforce the what we value as a society, a culture. I believe we have the responsibility to make schooling accessible to and supportive of all, and to structure our learning environments to promote student success. All students don’t necessarily enter school on equal ground, but we need to ensure that all are given the opportunity to achieve at a high level and be treated with dignity. Gender is one component of this, but certainly not the only one.

Having said this, as a professor at this institution, and as an “agent of the state” as a CSU employee, I believe it is my moral, ethical and legal obligation to promote the interests of the students and employees of this campus in service to the mission and vision of the campus and the CSU system. I also believe that things are occurring that are preventing this institution from fulfilling its mission, and that action needs to be taken to create change....

I absolutely regret that taking time away from grading can hurt your progress in this course and the achievement of learning outcomes, but I also fear that if I don’t take action that the quality of education will suffer throughout the university for many years to come, and not just this one class for a week or two. I hope you will understand my temporary absence, even if you don’t agree with my reasons for doing so....

I got about a dozen private emails from students thanking me for writing this letter, showing understanding regarding the grading delay, and supporting me in my work outside of class (some even asking how they could become more involved or wishing more faculty were doing this kind of work). I didn’t hear from any students voicing concerns, but I now recognize that those who were concerned likely didn’t feel comfortable indicating this to me or my chair while the course was still in session (they are vulnerable because I assign their grade).

I ended up getting grades posted relatively quickly after posting this letter, but was still feeling guilty about not being as connected to the student learning as I wanted and as I thought students deserved. I tried to remind myself that there are many online courses where students don’t get to interact with anyone (instructor or classmate), but merely obtain grades on work submitted. These students were getting some immediate feedback from peers and, eventually, feedback from me. Yet the feedback from me came after they had already moved on to a new unit’s topics, and thus not when they were most likely to incorporate it into their dialogue with others. I knew I wasn’t doing all that should be done, but I was hoping that it was enough and that my reasons for being distanced were valid.

December 15: Anger

November and early December were a blur. In addition to the discussion posts, the students now had work due related to their group projects. For their success on the project they needed me to be engaged with them as they addressed the content of the assignment while negotiating the challenges of online group work and posting items to a wiki. These increased demands on my time as an instructor came at the same time as my workload increased in the Faculty Center and on the Senate Executive Committee. While I had known there would be times when my multiple responsibilities would require me to become stressed, the workload was more difficult because of unanticipated stress related to an uncertain budget situation, possible program discontinuation, possible lay-offs, a censure of the interim Provost, and a vote of no confidence in the university President.
Further, the boat on which I live needed repairs and I had to live temporarily with friends in a space without internet access. What was expected to be a 2-3 week do-it-yourself project for approximately $3,000 ended up taking 5 months and costing over $13,000. I found a way to muddle through the expected and unexpected responsibilities and stressors that arose in November and December, but the quality of my work suffered greatly.

Maslow (1954) theorized a “hierarchy of needs,” indicating in part that when basic physiological and safety needs are unmet, one’s ability to function and be fulfilled is greatly compromised. I had a safe place to live, but amid all of the other stressors it was a particularly bad time not to be in a place that felt like “home.” I couldn’t engage with the online class from home, but instead was working in coffee houses when I couldn’t make the one-hour trip to campus. I was uncertain about my future employment due to budget cuts (and having to actively apply for jobs) and draining my savings to pay for boat repairs. My physical health deteriorated as I worked with toxic paints and chemicals while repairing the boat and worsened due to mold and allergens present in my temporary home. Had my basic needs been better met, I might have been more prepared to face anticipated and unanticipated workplace challenges. But instead, I had little reserve and ended up less effective at everything I tried to do.

I eventually realized that even though it was what appeared to be in the best interests of student learning, I could not read 700+ posts a week, provide individualized feedback, review group projects, and get grades posted in a timely manner. The interaction among students via the small group and full-class discussion boards continued to be thoughtful, demonstrating critical thinking and a desire to support one another’s learning. I, therefore, chose not to change the requirement for the posts, but I let go of my commitment to respond to each student each week. Instead I offered more summative comments for groups of posts, still allowing my feedback, insights, concerns, and praise to be shared, but in a more general manner than before. This allowed grading to be completed more quickly, but it failed to provide the individualized attention I felt students deserved. It was a compromise, and one that left me bitter. I wasn’t being the teacher I wanted to be, and students weren’t getting from me what I had promised. I had become more of a facilitator than a teacher, and I was quite angry at myself.

Eventually I saw a few ways to ease the stress and better support the students in the course. I extended some deadlines, modified some expectations on the wiki project, and changed the interview project from a mandatory to an optional assignment (adjusting grading expectations if not completed). I created some more content-related extra credit in case my decreased individualized attention had negatively impacted their ability to submit their best work. Out-of-class campus stressors also lessened as finals approached, allowing me a bit more time to focus on teaching and my own health. The submission of grades signaled the cessation of course obligations, but I continued to be haunted by opportunities missed. The student grade distribution was quite similar to prior semesters, perhaps indicating that the course enhancements I made over the summer may have helped to overcome my lack of individualized attention during portions of the course. However, it also suggested that my full engagement might have lead to even greater student success.

January 2010: Depression

By mid-January, I had somewhat recovered from the fall term and was beginning to think about how to better engage in my spring course. I was optimistic about the start of a new term, and felt I could be better prepared than I was in fall. My good spirits soured as I received the IDEA standardized student evaluations from Gender and Education. The average student ratings of the course and me as an instructor were the lowest I had ever received. I looked in disbelief as the ratings appeared to confirm my worst fears - that I had failed as a professor. Teaching has always been the most joyous and rewarding aspect of faculty life, and I disappointed my students and myself. I put the forms aside and didn’t return to them for a few days. I had never before been depressed by student evaluations, and I hope never to experience it again.

There were six narrative comments included among the submitted evaluations, and although there was positive feedback, I hated to see in writing what I already knew on my own – that my lack of individual feedback caused problems for at least some of the students. In courses with 50-60 students, I can become depressed by even one student’s negative comment. But in this term there were several critical comments, which I had to take seriously as a shared, rather than an isolated, experience. The IDEA form included a few comments that were highly praiseworthy, one that even indicated I was among the best teachers the student had had. There was also one comment that indicated I interacted with students a lot, while another indicated I disappeared. I was unable to let this go. So much of my identity is linked...
to teaching that what appeared as a rejection of the quality of the course and my role within it felt like an indication that I was an unworthy person.

I was two months away from teaching my next class, so I didn’t have an opportunity to immediately redeem myself. I stewed in my failure and questioned all of the choices I had made for the class, my participation in service and research activities, and the way I used my time outside of work. I forgot everything I knew about course evaluations, and allowed my worst fears about the course to become validated by the data presented in the IDEA summaries.

March 2010: Acceptance

After the passage of a bit more time, and in part due to the reflection that occurred while writing the first iterations of this essay, I have come to a greater level of acceptance of what occurred in fall, why it occurred, and what I will do in the future.

I took a new look at the IDEA evaluations and noted that only 32% of the students completed the form. This low response rate is typical in online courses and is indicated by IDEA as “inadequate to assure representativeness of the class as a whole.” Further, even with a representative sample, IDEA is not intended to be the sole or main means to assess the quality of a course or instructor. It was time for me to accept that my IDEA scores were less positive than those in prior courses, but also to remember that while they offer useful information, they are not definitive.

Each term I provide an end-of-class survey for which students may obtain extra credit points for completion (I can identify who has completed a survey, but cannot link the responses to a specific student). Over 80% of the students completed with survey. Sixty percent of those who did not complete the survey had earned an A in the course and didn’t need the extra points (thus some who were quite successful did not provide feedback), and more than half of the others had requested an incomplete in the course and were not yet able to complete the survey. The survey asks the students to indicate the most interesting things learned in the course, to identify their favorite unit, what they liked best about the course, what about the course design supported their learning, what suggestions they have for course improvements, what they did to support or undermine their own success in the course and questions about what they can do and understand differently because of the course. I have used similar surveys for several years, so I am able to compare responses over time.

The surveys indicated that the structure of the group conversations, discussion board, and group projects was a positive course design, even if I did not provide as much feedback as I had hoped. Several students indicated that it was unreasonable for me to expect to be able to provide feedback to every student every week within the threads, and that the summative comments that I thought were compromises were sometimes more helpful because I was linking ideas from several threads into one. It appears that perhaps instead of setting up an expectation that I respond to every student every week, that if I designed the course with students expecting me to provide periodic summaries as the unit progresses, and providing direct feedback where most useful, that I can still have successful discussions and a more reasonable workload. Only two of the 48 posts suggested cutting down on the number of discussion posts required, which suggests that even when poorly facilitated that students found them valuable.

The surveys also indicated that students really liked the organization of the course and found the unit materials helpful in preparing them for the readings and for drawing attention to the major themes they would encounter in the unit. Many mentioned that the discussion topics gave them some flexibility to focus on issues they found most compelling and let them learn perspectives from others they hadn’t thought of on their own. Several also noted that the “previewing the next unit” topics in the group conversations helped them to think about what was coming before doing the reading, which made them care a bit more about the topic (something they don’t necessarily naturally do when taking a general education course).

Among the recommendations for improvements were suggestions to highlight upcoming deadlines for major projects several units earlier, to increase the size of conversation groups, to add even more readings from outside the textbook, to post grades more often, and to provide more comments. When read at the same time as the positive comments about the course design and what was learned, I was much more receptive to the comments about the negative impacts of my delays in getting things completed. The students made amazing comments about what they could do better because of the course, what they understand differently because of the course, and most importantly how they will participate in the world differently because of the course. It was clear from these surveys that there were many positive outcomes from the course, even if it wasn’t their favorite class and I wasn’t their favorite instructor.
I've also begun to look at some direct measures of student learning, at times comparing student work from fall 2009 with prior semesters. I have started critically reviewing discussion postings and wiki projects from the past two terms, looking to see if there are any significant differences in the achievement of learning objectives. A cursory review suggests that the wiki projects became stronger in fall 2009, and thus some changes to the assignment description and facilitation may have been beneficial. For the units I have reviewed to date, there are no significant differences in the demonstration of learning of core concepts in the comments made on the discussion board to questions I had posed, but there were lengthier and more in-depth follow-up posts among students and myself in the prior years. I don’t know if this is because of my participation in the threads or other factors (I wasn’t the only one who had added stressors in fall, and there were fewer students in the fall 2009 section who were preparing to be teachers). The discussions, therefore, weren’t as rich, but core learning outcomes were still achieved at an acceptable level.

As I continue to process my experience last fall I recognize that while the course did not go as it should have, it was not a complete disaster. There are many things I can do in the future to take into account what I have learned from Fall 2009. First and foremost, I need to create a course design that not only takes into account best practices for student learning, but also anticipates a realistic workload for me as an instructor. I likely cannot lower the course enrollment cap, but I can choose to not exceed it. I can experiment with new ways to provide meaningful, individualized feedback within a reasonable period of time. The survey results indicate satisfaction with the general course expectations and material in the course units, which means that I can update rather than recreate materials, and that can free up more time for interaction with students. And since many students have successfully completed this course, I may be able to enlist one or two of them to serve as teaching assistants who can assist me with providing feedback and posting grades. It is clear that student satisfaction with a course isn’t only or even primarily tied to what they learned, but to how engaged they are with the learning and how much they feel they matter as part of the learning experience. In an online course, the connections made via comments on the discussion board and feedback on graded work demonstrate to the student that their unique presence matters.

Whether I change how I provide feedback or increase the number of people providing informed feedback, I need to be more careful to show students that they do indeed matter. I allowed myself to partially disengage because I didn’t feel their presence or need viscerally as I did those with whom I had face to face contact, and that is an error I cannot allow to recur.

Although there are improvements to be made with regard to this class, the course might not have gone awry if I had done other things differently last fall. In the future, I can also make different choices about how many courses I teach and the choices I make with regard to research and service. While in the midst of the chaos of the fall term, it did not seem appropriate to resign from some of my commitments, but perhaps I would do so in the future. My stressful work and home situation was compounded by poor health. I did not seem to have the energy to invest in exercise and meditation (how could I do such selfish things when there was so much work to be done?), but engaging in more self-care would likely in the end have made it easier for me to face the challenges that arose. I also need to accept that some things are uncontrollable, and that no amount of planning can ensure success.

A course went awry, but it was also a symptom of a semester gone awry. When writing my first draft of this paper, I was still deep in depression and my focus was on a course that had failed (a signal indeed that I was a failure). As I complete this essay, it has become a narrative about grieving. It chronicles a series of losses - lost opportunities, lost connections, loss achievement – and the failure to make the most out of the time we had together in GEND 4100. There are many positive outcomes from this course, but there was much unrealized potential. I grieve for what didn’t occur, and what I no longer have the chance to do with those students. I also now recognize that there was much that is worth celebrating from the term, both in what the students learned and what I have learned as a faculty member. I expect to feel the loss from this course and this term for years to come, but I can also become a better teacher if I appropriately learn from this experience and change my own behaviors inside and outside of the “classroom.”

Bibliography

I Have Tourette’s of the Pen

Taylor Marcell
Department of Kinesiology

It’s that time of year again. I’m grading rough drafts of student term papers, and I think I have developed a new neurological disorder; “Tourette’s of the pen.” Tourette’s syndrome is normally characterized by: “repetitive, stereotyped, involuntary movements and vocalizations called tics” including eye blinking, vision irregularities, facial grimacing, shoulder shrugging, head or shoulder jerking… and “the most dramatic and disabling tics are those that result in self-harm or vocal tics including coprolalia (uttering swear words) or echolalia (repeating the words or phrases of others)” (NINDS, 2010). However, my personal Tourette’s “tic” is expressed in the form of the comments I find myself writing on student’s papers. At the beginning of the academic term, I bought my favorite 12-pack of colored pens and will use them all before the end of the year. This makes me think of writing a parody for the Willie Nelson song, “to all the ‘pens’ I’ve lost before…. ” A student recently commented, “It looks like your pen threw-up on my paper.” With this in mind, I have wanted to express my concerns for some time now, on what I perceive as the poor quality of student writing as they complete assignments and my approaches to addressing this problem within my discipline. What follows is a personal journey through the process of grading student work, maintaining expectations, while trying to encourage success – here I offer my experiences with the “good, bad, and the ugly” of assessing student writing and my Tourette’s of the pen.

My struggle grading written work comes from my desire to balance encouragement and student-centered teaching with constructive criticism so students have an opportunity to improve their intellectual capital. When grading I have often heard that you should “always write something positive followed by the critique.” My question, as blunt as it may appear, is “who is this helping?” Are critique and criticism ‘dirty’ words? Are we entering a culture where students will sue teachers if they do not like the comments they receive (several high profile cases have been in the news). If I critique students too harshly they might give me poor reviews on their course evaluations and this could impact my retention and promotion. In class or during office hours, I believe I am encouraging my students to be better writers when I tell them that the paper they are holding (literally dripping from a Tourette’s bath of red ink) is not a personal reflection on their personality, but a marker of their inability to write (not so encouraging after all?). Will an honest critique help students write better?

What are the political ramifications of students graduating who cannot technically write well and when they enter the workforce how will this shortcoming reflect upon our campus community? The problems are akin to grade inflation. Student grades do not always reflect their mastery of the subject matter therefore they enter jobs for which they are not qualified, and eventually this will demean the reputation of the College or University (Stanoyevitch, 2008). I have conversed with colleagues and have asked for answers as to the possible causes of this poor writing epidemic and who or what is to blame. Is there a failure in the educational system that has prevented our students from learning how to write; can we blame the 60’s culture where teaching penmanship and grammar went out of vogue for teaching Shakespeare? Are we not reinforcing technical writing skills throughout the student’s educational journey; thus, is it collectively our fault? Has the No Child Left Behind Act precluded teachers from teaching what is needed and in turn exacerbated the situation, leaving us all further behind? Currently, writing occurs minimally in K-12 because of NCLB mandates, cluttered curriculums, over-populated classrooms, and teacher preparation not requiring teachers to have a writing course before entering the classroom; in other words no writing pedagogy background. Because Writing Matters (2006), is an excellent text addressing the need for enhancing writing pedagogy in our schools. Alternatively, does poor writing come from the home? Greater parental involvement and simply having books in the home has
been associated with greater student success (Chen, 2008). On the other hand, is the inability to express one’s self in writing or prose an actual learning disability? There is a neurological condition recognized by the National Institute for Neurological Disorders & Stroke called dysgraphia in which young children struggle converting cognitive thoughts and ideas into a written form (NINDS, 2009). This dysgraphia condition is often characterized by: illegible and consistently poor handwriting, mixing upper and lower case letters, mixing print and cursive letters, irregular and inconsistent letter sizes and shapes, along with incorrect spelling (Chen, 2009). Thus, do the students lack the cultural and educational knowledge to write proficiently? In the end, will it matter whose fault it has been?

A factor to consider regarding poor writing abilities is the impact that television, the internet, and text messaging have had on writing conventions. Has information-technology helped students write better, or is it merely easier to cut and paste a paper together from internet sources? In my experience students do not understand the hyperlink functions within most internet and word processing programs. Therefore, I require an electronic version of their final draft paper be submitted and by magically wafting the computer mouse over the manuscript, one can find the hyperlinks still embedded into their text and then just control-click on the link and you will be taken to where the student acquired his or her information. Alternatively, turnitin.com is a program available on campus to help identify plagiarism; I have found it works better as a tool for the students to see how their rough drafts are put together as opposed to curtailing plagiarism. A shortcoming to this program is that it does not compare student papers to enough medical references within my discipline. [Since writing my first draft of this paper I have made a request to turnitin.com to utilize PubMed.gov the internet warehouse for the U.S. National Library of Medicine housing over 19 million citations for biomedical articles from MEDLINE and life science journals, and the company has indicated they will include this into their program; amazing what you can get done with a simple request].

Now, I'm not a literary expert and do not pretend to have the answers to this multi-faceted problem, yet as I sit here to write this vignette (I have not yet committed to considering it a manuscript) a sense of hypocrisy overcomes my rational thought; maybe we as educators (yes, including me… or is that especially me?) have not been the best “grammarians” in our past and do not work well outside our comfort zone. If the latter is the case, perhaps we do not emphasize our students’ grammatical shortcomings because of our uncertainty as to what is considered correct versus currently acceptable in writing. For example, look at the word irregardless. It’s in the dictionary regardless of its incorrect usage in prose. Clearly English prose and scientific manuscripts have different structures and purposes, but any student preparing for graduate school needs to learn APA style and demonstrate strong writing skills. My query comes from the fact that I teach exclusively juniors, seniors, and graduate level students who still do not write well even after completing their campus English requirements. I originally had high expectations that I would be focusing the majority of my efforts critiquing content and completing rational thoughts. Instead, I find myself spending the majority of my time on spelling errors (come on students, can’t you see the red underlines all across your page?), sentence fragments, run-on sentences, block quotation issues, correct use of APA style (I refer my students to http://owl.english.purdue.edu for assistance with APA style and format), and my favorite pet peeve, the inability to set the margins and type font as outlined in class; see Appendix A for my personal scoring sheet that I share with my students before beginning an assignment so they know what formatting details I emphasize while grading. I also find that emphasizing the “because” statement helps students complete their concepts in writing; why do things happen the way they do, “because” …? Still, whatever happened to Strunk & White’s Elements of Style (1979) as a required text? All of this is enough for me to commit Hari-kari.

I wonder if poor writing skills boil down to procrastination? I have had three months to write this essay, so why am I just getting started two days before it is due? Is time management a factor? Are we all so busy as faculty that to keep up with the pile of papers in front of us we forego the grammatical issues to focus on the content as mentioned above? Therefore, we may compound the issue by not addressing quality academic writing every opportunity we can. Is poor writing laziness on our part? We all share the reality of impacted teaching schedules (but are we not all glad we have two furlough days a month to just relax?), or is trying to do it all just another condemnation of multitasking (Abaté, 2008)? But I digress. Clearly, the jury is still out on me.

In addressing my own shortcoming in writing I have recently read with enthusiasm, and recommend to all, a humorous look into the world of zero tolerance for punctuation and grammatical errors titled Eats, Shoots & Leaves (Truss, 2003) for those of us needing a light-refresher course on the topic (please note that my writing style in no way reflects, or is a representation of, L. Truss’s book; legal disclaimer...
provided for humorous effect only]. To aid my students in avoiding common pitfalls in scientific writing I provide the students a list of simple tips and errors to avoid (Appendix B). Additionally, I recommend to my students an excellent manuscript on peer review titled Manuscript Peer Review: A Helpful Checklist for Students and Novice Referees, providing students a checklist on how to critically review and critique published research articles when they are preparing their own work (Seals & Tanaka, 2000).

Oddly enough, as I ramble my way through my personal experiences in assessing student work and coming to terms with my own shortcomings in writing, I keep reaching for my phone, wishing I could call someone in the English department to help me rephrase a sentence or ask about the proper verb or adjective usage. My realization is that this, in and of itself, is the problem with today’s students – not that they are ill-prepared for college courses, or that they take the easy route when given the opportunity to learn how to be better writers (by avoiding taking ENGL 1000), but that they fail to go to the Writing Center, the Reference Librarian, or make appointments with me for assistance. Where did I put that Samurai sword again? Alas, I hope that this self-reflection into the difficulties students, faculty, and I face trying to translate thought into prose will make me more compassionate towards student’s writing and help minimize my personal condition of Tourette’s of the pen. My journey continues…

Acknowledgements

I must thank all those professors I have had over the years who have been critical of my written work that in the end have helped me overcome my own writing disabilities, including my mother who made me spell words everyday in grade school to improve my notoriously poor spelling. Especially to my graduate advisor who would stand over my shoulder while I prepared a 500 word abstract for publication and would question the use of each and every word forcing me to critically evaluate my writing. To my research colleagues who challenge me to continue conducting my research that keeps me writing and critically thinking. To my students (good and bad) because no matter how much I complain about grading term papers, I love my job. Lastly, to the peer-reviewers who read, edited, and expressed their Tourette’s of the pen on my rough draft of this paper that substantially improved its final form. I thank you all.
## Appendix A

### Scoring Sheet for both Rough- & Final-Draft:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Points Deducted</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Failed to Follow Format:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name/Date in Header</td>
<td>-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proper Use of Subheadings</td>
<td>-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1” Margins on All Sides</td>
<td>-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Font (Times New Roman) &amp; Size (12 pt)</td>
<td>-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Page #’s Bottom Right Corner (all pages)</td>
<td>-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title at Top of Page; Not in Header</td>
<td>-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rough/Final Draft Length &lt; 3 Pages</td>
<td>-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rough/Final Paper Length &gt; 5 Pages</td>
<td>-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Failed to Follow Directions:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Failed to Submit Copy to Turn-It-In</td>
<td>-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Failed to Submit Electronic Copy</td>
<td>-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content Issues:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turn-It-In Percentage &lt; 5%</td>
<td>-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turn-It-In Percentage &gt; 35%</td>
<td>-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grammar &amp; Spelling Issues</td>
<td>-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Person Verb Usage</td>
<td>-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of Block Quotes</td>
<td>-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excessive Use of “Quoted” Material (Paraphrase)</td>
<td>-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-Text Citations Not in APA Style</td>
<td>-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reference List Not in APA Style</td>
<td>-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer-Reviewed Journal Article References &lt; 5</td>
<td>-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction: topic clearly introduced; why read it?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physiology: rationale clearly presented; how do things work? Key points outlined.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intervention: relationship to exercise/performance/health outlined?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opinion: recommendations presented/based on documentation, not personal opinion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Major Issues:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Points Deducted</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Submitted Late/After Due Date</td>
<td>-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resubmitted Same Paper w/out Significant Changes</td>
<td>-12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix B

One-step in my current journey to improve student writing was the creation of a few writing tips that I share with my exercise physiology students (with assistance from J. Azevedo, personal communication).

- No quotes; they are a sign of laziness… try to understand the concept and paraphrase the ideas in your own voice (then cite your sources)
- Hypotheses NOT theories are explored in research articles (singular = hypothesis)
- Data do NOT prove a hypothesis; data demonstrate, show, or indicate an idea; they cannot prove anything
- Do NOT use possessive nouns, e.g. “Smith’s data demonstrate…” instead write “the data of Smith demonstrate…” or “…muscle’s oxidative capacity is enhanced with training”, instead write “…the oxidative capacity of muscle is enhanced with training”
- Do NOT use the first person, e.g. “I am writing this review…” instead write “The purpose of the present review…” Do NOT use second person (you, your). Objectivity is valued and the passive voice makes statements appear objective
- “There” is a location, remember “there” is “here”; “their” is a plural possessive; “they’re” = contraction of “they are”
- Use a “lead sentence” to start a paragraph. For example: [ ] = lead sentence. [It has been shown that endurance training increases mitochondrial enzyme activity as much as two-fold (4, 9, 12, 18).] Holloszy (9) in 1967 showed …
- Avoid run-on sentences. To connect two sentences use a semi-colon (“;”) or a conjunction (remember the acronym “FANBOYS”; for, and, but, or, yet, so)
- When writing about a series of data, and using “respectively” you must offset respectively. For example: citrate synthase activities were 24.3 and 55.2 umol/g min in muscle from UT and T rats, respectively
- Too = also, as well: he’s coming too. Excessive: too much. To = in a direction toward: going to the movie; reaching as far as: cut to the bone; resultant condition; toward a given state; and many others that you may look up in the dictionary
- “Then” adv. at that time, next, after that, and also. adj. of that time, the then president. n. that time, from then on. “Than” conj. used to introduce the second element of a comparison, he is taller than you
- Do NOT use “etc.” to finish a list. List everything, or simply write that there are many causes, effects, variables
- Do NOT use LINGO or casual language. For example: “…exercise is key to…” or “the effects were pretty good”
- Read your paper out loud; your ear will catch mistakes your eyes glance over… you are writing it, so when just reading to yourself your brain will fill in the blanks in logic, structure, or grammar
- Seek help! You have friends who can read your paper, go to the writing center or reference librarian on campus, or ask your instructor. I will be happy to help you with your paper if you ask…

Reference List
Put On Your Boots and Teach!

Teachers, using their collective power, can make inroads to real education for students in today’s classrooms

Christopher Roe

“Why do I have to do this?” asks the child. “Because I say so,” responds the distressed parent.

“Why do we have to do this?” ask the students. “Because you have to take the test,” says the over-stressed teacher.

“Why do we have to do this?” ask the teachers. “Because I could lose my job if you don’t!” barks the stressed-out principal.

“And so it goes,” to coin a phrase used by Kurt Vonnegut.

Courageous teachers, those with the security in their knowledge and their careers, can make a difference. They can bring about change. Exemplary of this is the teaching Hispanic leader Cesar Chavez did outside the classroom, with his deep-seeded involvement in bettering the conditions of the farm workers in the 1960s and 1970s. Though he was not a classroom teacher, he taught consumers to be aware that the food they put on their tables was only there because of hard working farm workers who were treated poorly by their employers. He taught farm workers that they could make a difference by taking a stand against their employers for a better working environment. He taught everyone that one person could make a difference. Si se puede.

Teachers can make a difference as well. One courageous teacher, a long-time veteran of the classroom, wears cowboy boots to school every day. She does so to remind herself of what she is doing and why she is doing it. Her mantra, “Go get yourself some boots and start kickin’,” hit home with me immediately. Though petite in stature, she is powerful, strong and secure in her knowledge and teaches children the way she knows they will learn. She uses the standards “because they are good” but inserts her own style and methods while she delivers the district’s curriculum. Can all teachers do this? Perhaps it is unreasonable, because some may lack experience, courage or knowledge, time or resources. Others may lack the energy it takes to create instruction outside the given box of materials or still others may lack the security in their careers. But what if they had boots?

Under the Bush administration in 2001, the government fundamentally changed the way educators perform their duties in classrooms by authorizing No Child Left Behind (NCLB). Was it a good policy? Was it a bad policy? The results are still out. What it did do was create standards by which teachers instruct students. One contribution that most teachers will praise is the policy’s ideal of leveling quality.

At the same time as the playing field was being leveled, NCLB also created a sense of panic among educational administrators. They now had to ensure all teachers were teaching to the standards and report the mandated test results showing teachers were teaching to the standards. This is where things went off the field. Now we have a system of automated classrooms led by teachers reading from scripted texts teaching students the same information on the same day throughout schools in the entire country. Teachers no longer have the professional freedom to teach as they know best in order to reach desired results. They now go into their classrooms, open their manuals, and read the script in order to prepare students for the test on Friday.

This is especially true in “program improvement schools”, where test scores fall below the standard. Teachers feel they have lost their voice for curricular freedom. Regaining their collective voice, thereby developing their strength as educators as a whole, is what is needed to make a difference in teaching today.

Teachers have long known that they make a difference in the lives of students. They provide access to many doors that will lead to success for students should they choose to open those doors. As a premise, teachers also know how to teach. They know what works with students and why they themselves do certain things in specific ways. This “knowing” also leads to what will get results from students. The results they achieve inform their instruction and alerts them when they have to re-teach and when they can move on to the next topic. According to Leblanc, (1988) “… teaching is about caring, nurturing, and developing
minds and talents. It’s about devoting time, often invisible, to every student.” Time is what teachers no longer have to in order to accomplish all that is required of them.

NCLB has additional consequences. Students are rarely exposed to any form of creative teaching that would enable them and their teachers to get pleasure from their school day as they learn and teach. Teachers no longer get to plan their day as they see fit based on what students learned the previous day. Principals push their teachers daily to meet the standards in order to reach artificially set goals and advance their schools in the district. This creates a cycle of misguided instruction and unimaginative classrooms. It also prevents the school from going into receivership—being taken over by the state due to underachievement, which could result in the reassignment of teachers as well as the loss of the principal’s job. These consequences are evident in schools across the country today.

Because of NCLB, the educational process in America is broken. It begs to be fixed. Teachers have to take ownership of their classrooms, but in doing so, they risk losing their jobs if they do not have tenure, and/or being reassigned to other schools if they have tenure.

Those without security in the district are easily released at the end of their first or second year, without cause. Tenure is what teachers work toward so that they have job security and can safely teach until their retirement. Therefore, educators are prepared to tow the line during the first two years so they are not dismissed—they listen, they follow directions, and they do as they are told without question. Those with tenure who are safely teaching until retirement may choose not to use their voice. They follow along with directives and do as they are told because they have been trained not to challenge authority, just as we train our children not to challenge us as parents. And so it goes.

The Obama administration’s “blueprint for education,” (2010) a revision of NCLB, does little to address the concerns of educators. While it does not relinquish the testing cycle, it does emphasize academic growth rather than judging schools based on their test scores. Time will tell how this new reauthorization will impact education in the coming years.

Another problem stemming from the standardization of teaching is the lack of money. The resources are not there for teachers, schools, and districts to provide an adequate, equitable education for all learners. The government is attaching incentives for districts in order to receive funds, which in turn puts the pressure on principals and teachers to reach potentially unrealistic goals without consideration of the demographics of the school or district.

Not all teachers have what it takes to make a classroom magical or interesting or creative. At least they have the basic scripted curriculum provided and a set of standards by which to instruct. And that is okay. It takes time to grow as a professional and learn to improvise or insert new learning connected to the curriculum or to push the envelope and modify the curriculum in order to best meet the needs of your students. It takes time to realize that there are other ways to teach that might be more effective for students.

But there are enough teachers, in every school and in every district, who know better. They know what works. They have the will, the skills, and the knowledge to make a difference. They have experience. They have the wherewithal to teach anything to anyone. But they don’t have boots.

If they had boots, they would say, no yell, “NO, WE'RE NOT TAKING IT ANYMORE!” when the administration brings in a new curriculum or a new text or a new demand to bring more stress to their students and into their classrooms. With tenure comes security. While this sometimes may not be a positive aspect of the process (some may work less enthusiastically), attaining tenure is one of power. Teachers with tenure have power and influence. They have the ability to make choices for themselves and for their students. They have the ability to say no when they feel adding more means teaching less. They need to put on their boots.

Helping students learn is the basis of all teaching. If this is true, then teachers have to choose what works best for them rather than use something presented to them designed by someone who has not seen the inside of a classroom or met their students (Brookfield, 2006). Teachers at any school can make a change for the betterment and growth for students. They can bring about a stampede of enlightenment for the school and pass that energy along to another school until all schools in the district are standing up for what they believe is best for students. The teachers need to stand up for what is pedagogically sound and what could be occurring in the classroom instead of what is taking place today.

Teachers need boots. They need to remind themselves just how much power they have. They need to be able to tell students exactly why they are doing what they are doing without having to do it for a test. They need to put on their boots and start kickin’ for our students.
Dr. Chris Roe has been in education for 28 years. He has taught in the elementary grades, has served as an administrator and is currently an Assistant Professor of Teacher Education at California State University, Stanislaus.

References

Vonnegut, K. (x). Slaughterhouse five.
Setting the Stage

The task of the excellent teacher is to stimulate "apparently ordinary" people to unusual effort. The tough problem is not in identifying winners: it is in making winners out of ordinary people.

~K. Patricia Cross

Most of the articles in Faculty Voices offer reflections about teaching and learning from faculty. In keeping with this agenda, I too started off on my first draft with the title “My Experiences in Authentic Assessment.” Authentic assessment is performance based and gives every student an opportunity to show her/his mastery of the topic. But does it? Doesn’t authentic assessment still have to be evaluated with the instructor-calibrated rubrics? Is there a point we can say assessment is objective? Personally, I struggle with assigning that Final grade to a handful of students because of the consequence that grade can make in the student’s graduation date. Would I have chosen this profession had I known how stressful it is to grade? The more I ponder this, the more I want to know why a person chooses the teaching profession.

Most of the undergraduate teaching faculty do more teaching than learning. One may argue that “teaching and learning are two sides of a coin” and every teaching moment is also a learning moment. Leaving such philosophical adage aside, if I were to honestly look at courses I teach – even a new course – what I learn is not as dense as my students’ learning. With this underlying axiom, I decided to survey the college students who are teaching in one of my programs. Most of them have never “taught” although a few have helped their friends, and a few have tutored at the tutoring center on campus. I chose this setting for my informal study as many students opted for the teaching career after spending two semesters as a math/science coach in this program.

Voice of Budding Faculty

A good teacher is like a candle - it consumes itself to light the way for others.

~Author Unknown

One of my programs – the High School Mathematics Access Program (HiMAP) – was launched in September 1995. The program is in its sixteenth year. Many perceive it as a tutoring program that meets once a week for two hours to help students in grades six to twelve to get through their math and science homework. I want it to be recognized as a Saturday Math/Science Academy where students are coached and mentored to reach their highest academic potential. The students come from are Denair, Delhi, Hickman, Hughson, Livingston, Modesto, Patterson, Turlock, Riverbank, and Waterford. The coaches include undergraduate students, secondary school math and science teachers, one high school student, one Modesto Junior College student, one CSU Stanislaus graduate student, and three college faculty. This semester, HiMAP has twenty-two coaches and they come from China, Mexico, Hong Kong, India, Iran, Kenya, Sweden and USA. This allows each participant to get one on one coaching, which accounts for the success of this program. One might think that the learners in this program are the 6 – 12 students who can get answers to all the questions from the week’s lessons. However, the lesson that the HiMAP tutors learn in their role as coaches and mentors is invaluable.

In this article, I want to voice my HiMAP coaches’ reflection on their job as faculty. I would like my reader to ponder the similarities – in perception and reality – about the teaching profession between the HiMAP’s novices and experienced university faculty. What do the tutors learn from their opportunity to coach at HiMAP? In one of my first prompts, I asked them to reflect on their expectations and role as teachers with the following questions:
• Describe what you expected to do and gain from HiMAP.

• Describe the most important ‘teaching/learning’ moment for you at HiMAP.

Charleyne, from Kenya, a foreign student, is a sophomore in Chemistry. She wrote:

….. Initially I had the fear of what if I do not know how to do a certain problem. Should I ask? What will they think of me? What if we end up with students who do not want to listen and prefer distracting the others in the room who want to learn? All my questions, fears, doubts, were taken care of when I realized I was not alone; HiMAP is made up of a team….”

To be honest I shared Charleyne’s fears in my first year of teaching Calculus I as a graduate student at the University of Illinois. I worked out every single problem in each chapter and reviewed it until I felt totally ready. My fear took many weeks to subside. It was not until the end of my first semester of teaching when I discovered that my students asked me only the problems that were assigned as homework. I began to feel confident in my role and slowly started to enjoy teaching. Reflecting on her second semester of coaching, Charleyne writes:

….. The most important teaching moment was when I was working with a student on simplifying. We (me and the student) had been at it for two Saturdays in a row. The fact that I was not getting through was really trying. Finally, … one Saturday we did a couple of problems together and she had grasped the material. That was a light bulb moment. It is a time when they are asking questions and are curious so knowing that you can set an example for them to look up to is incredible.

Charleyne’s voice knowing that you can set an example for them to look up to is incredible echoes what many of us have experienced at least once a day. It also chimes with the adage – “Reach for the Power: Teach”. Could this continual shot of knowledge power be what makes some academics smug in social circles?

Gabriela is a junior and wants to be a math teacher. She writes:

I expected to help … to tutor … but I actually have found myself involved in more than just tutoring….. I am also given the opportunity to encourage students to learn on their own and explore into the realm of mathematics through brain teasers, puzzles, and other creative ways of intriguing the students’ critical thinking and problem solving.

William Wordsworth, in the famous poem, The Rainbow, uses the expression, “The child is father of the man.” Gabriela already exhibits the traits of an inspiring teacher. That she will not only not give mindless repetitive skill drills to her students, but will engage the students in learning is evident in her thoughtful response, I am also given the opportunity to encourage students to learn on their own and explore into the realm of mathematics.

In her reflection on the most important teaching moment she writes when I get to work with a student one on one, I learn how to determine what a student is having trouble with and I learn different ways of approaching material. …, I am able to focus … teach or coach better when it’s just the student and me; …”

Richard is a sophomore in Chemistry who graduated from Waterford High and entered CSU Stanislaus with a Presidential Scholarship. Here is what he had to say:

I originally thought HiMAP would be a more traditional tutoring program where I would be working … with students. I did not expect the more team-oriented approach to coaching, which is by far more effective.

The team Richard refers to is not student tutees teaming up, but the coaches working as a team observing each other’s strengths and seeking another coach in the room for a hint to solve a problem or for another solution which may be clearer to the student. Although Richard likes the idea of team teaching, he finds opportunities to coach individually. He writes:

There was a Sophomore High School student taking a chemistry course … be found the material rather arcane and unrelatable. I explained the material to him at a college level rather than the simplified explanations given in the book, and be found the more complex explanation more satisfying and easier to grasp … because … less hand-waving and more reasoned answers … finish the assignment on his own after I had given him a more detailed view of the concept.

Gabriela and Richard, even in their maiden attempts of coaching in HiMAP, have recognized the power and influence they can exert when there is an opportunity to work with a student one-on-one. We have all experienced this when a student comes into our office with a question. Here I like to recall Willy Russell’s renowned play Educating Rita (1983) that epitomizes the influence that the teacher and the taught have on each other. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Educating_Rita#Plot_summary)

For a more complete story go to http://faculty.frostburg.edu/phil/forum/EduRita.htm

Reflections On What More Can Be Done

Give the pupils something to do, not something to learn; and the doing is of such a nature as to demand thinking; learning naturally results.

~John Dewey
Next, I want to share with you my coaches’ responses to the prompt “What more could you do to help participants in their learning?”

Nataly and Yolanda, who are in the credentialing program, mirror what many of us might say. While Nataly responds to this prompt with a sense of despair and despondency, Yolanda views it with hope and a possible strategy. They write:

I wish I had more time with the students to help them understanding a concept. Many times I have found myself helping a student with a problem, which he/she seems to understand really well at the moment, but I’m not sure they will remember it in a week. (Nataly)

I could ensure that participants truly know the material and are not simply applying procedures without knowing the reason behind it. This can be done by asking students questions that are not in the text and require them to think beyond the information on the surface. (Yolanda)

Maria and Martin aspire to be secondary school math teachers. Both of them have struggled with many stumbling blocks to be where they are and understand the frustrations of being a bilingual learner.

While Maria says, “I think, I am doing my best in helping … Spanish speaking students to be able to understand. Even though they are very smart, but they have trouble in communicating with others.” Maria, being an English Learner understands the frustrations of her tutees. The ‘trouble in communication’ she is referring to is the difficulty in being able to talk to their classmates. HiMAP offers her an opportunity to develop strategies she can use in her own classroom.

To the same prompt, Martin responds, “I feel that I am doing everything I can to help the participants, but If anything I would have to say is to be more inspiring ….” If Martin keeps fanning that flame of desire to be a inspirational teacher, he is sure to be one eventually. More than anything else, this one characteristic can move him to be a teacher who will bring fun and excitement to a math class.

**Conclusion**

I started this off hoping to find an answer to explain why a person chooses to be in the teaching profession. In trying to find an answer, I chose a qualitative case study approach. I raised this issue because of what I experience every semester as an instructor. My search for an answer with my HiMAP coaches as my guides leads me to believe that they choose to teach for the same reason I did. The reason for choosing to teach is the simple unadulterated joy that fills your heart when you transfer that bit of knowledge to the person you are teaching; there is an ecstasy and feeling of power in having untangled that tangled web in the other.

*A good teacher is a master of simplification and an enemy of simplism.*

~Louis A. Berman

**Footnotes**

In this play *Educating Rita*, set in London, Rita, a working class girl who is tired of her lifestyle decides to get an education. She is assigned a tutor to work with her one-on-one. The tutor is a Professor of English Literature who is assigned to educate her in an attempt to change her ways her life. Their discourses about cultures and values of the middle class world and the literature are powerful and engaging.
Democracy is easy to extol. Represented as a noun, “democracy” is expressed as an object that may be owned, protected, given, or imposed. The verbal form, to democratize, is often the most profound longing of U.S. foreign policy. For instance, we are told that the goal of the campaign in Iraq is to begin democratizing the region. The practice of democracy differs greatly from its proclamation, which led Iris Marion Young to begin her treatise on democratic equality, *Inclusion and Democracy*, with a sage reminder—“Democracy is hard to love.”1 Practiced as a struggle for control over shared futures waged in the shadow of uncertainty, democracy is indeed hard to love. There is no certainty that “the people” will make sound decisions, let alone that they will refrain from co-opting and undermining the system by signaling themselves champions of democracy with one hand while restraining dissent with their other. It suffices to say that a pedagogy that prepares students for and promotes their involvement in civic activism ought to be a central tenet of higher education. The discipline of communications, broadly construed, is a fine place to begin the practice given our historical commitment to civic participation and ethics combined with practical instruction in the communication skills that make up the essence of democracy.

In this contribution, I will offer my suggestions on how to create a communications course that promotes meaningful civic activism. I will cover the design of assignments for the course, three learning objectives, and the problem of assessment. This contribution is informed by my experiences teaching three courses over a three year period on public argumentation and advocacy at The Pennsylvania State University.

The two assignments that I will cover in detail are letters to the editor and student-led public advocacy projects. These two assignments make students become aware of public interests while inserting themselves directly into public dialogue. For the letter to the editor assignment, the letter itself is of secondary importance. The preparatory work for this involves students choosing a newspaper, researching the periodical’s political affiliations, analyzing the content and character of its editorial pages, and annotating ten issues addressed in letters to the editor in the previous month. In the pre-letter writing stage, students write a one to two page sketch of the audience who read the periodical they were going to write to. These steps of preparation make students think of activism as a communicative practice directed to specific audiences with particular needs and interests. Furthermore, the assignment fosters a connection between contemplation and civic advocacy. The assignment thus includes the following: demographic information on a newspaper (one page of data), annotations for ten issues discussed in the editorial pages from the previous month (two to three pages), an analysis of the newspaper in terms of its implied audience (one to two pages), and a letter to the editor (one page).

The second, and much larger assignment, involves students designing and implementing a public advocacy project individually or in groups. After learning about issues that their publics were concerned about, students are given the task of writing an event proposal detailing the specifics of their public advocacy project, a grant proposal seeking internal or external funding for their project, carrying out the event itself, and writing a review of their event that includes a section on how they plan to incorporate this experience into their lives in the future. The students also create rubrics used to assess the performance component of their project. After the projects are completed, students are required to write an analysis of their performance including an assessment of how their project served the communities that they were reaching out to (three to four pages completed individually).

Although these assignments may seem daunting because of the time commitment required for the success of this type of pedagogy, the results were astounding. The majority of the students who walked into my classroom had under-developed political consciousnesses and were not actively involved in
their communities. Through this class, my students saved an Adult Literacy Center in Centre County, PA, raised thousands of dollars for local and international charities, and drew hundreds of people from the university and community to public debates, film screenings, photography exhibits, and theatrical performances. While all of the events performed were designed by students to fulfill requirements of my course, these students became better equipped to actively participate as citizens in a democratic culture.

There are a few notable learning objectives apparent in these assignments. The first, and primary, objective is to teach students to become more active citizens. By design, these two assignments deliver their voices and bodies into the public, bridging that unnecessary gap between town and gown. A second objective is to foster a type of responsible stewardship for political communication. With these assignments, students are required to enter into public dialogues. Prior to becoming part of such ongoing public communication, students were required to think about their audience, whether it be readers of a newspaper or an institution with the grant money available to facilitate their projects. A third objective was to emphasize a liberal arts inflected praxis—theory informed practice. There is true cause for concern when universities begin envisioning themselves as four years of job training. Such a system is useful for churning out obedient worker bees, not well rounded citizens prepared to participate fully in democratic cultures.

Courses centered on doing advocacy have an analogous pitfall because the projects themselves can easily become the sole focus of the course. Although not discussed in detail in this essay, I negotiated this problem by offering courses with challenging readings. For example, in the final offering (CAS498A: Rhetorical Theory in Action: The Rhetoric of Consciousness), students read essays from the discipline of rhetorical studies, while also reading Plato’s Republic, Friedrich Nietzsche’s On the Genealogy of Morals, Sigmund Freud’s Civilization and its Discontents, Herbert Marcuse’s One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society, and Judith Butler’s Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence. On top of the other projects, weekly response papers on readings of this caliber ensured that their public advocacy was part of an intellectually rigorous experience.

I will hasten to add that the first time I taught such an intellectually demanding course with the additional civic advocacy project focus, no one believed that it could be done—neither my colleagues, students, and, at times, not even myself. It worked nonetheless. The differences between academic competencies of students at Penn State and Stan State are not broad enough to dismiss such rigor as a possibility here.

The last issue that I will address in this article is the problem of assessment. Great care should be taken in a course like this to avoid anti-democratic applications of the teacher’s situated social power. From my perspective, the overarching goal in teaching such a course is to help students to find their voices and express their political positions in meaningful, effective, and responsible ways. The goal is not to create political lackeys unleashed on the community to do the professor’s bidding. The type of civic minded faculty member who would teach a course like this would need to exercise a great deal of restraint concerning their own political views. Demanding that students support their claims and downgrading them when they either cannot or do not is responsible pedagogy; demanding that they change their claims in favor of those held by their assessor is unconscionable. Likewise, assessments must be made on the quality of the ancillary writing, the soundness of argumentation used to advance claims, and on the quality of the public events.

I manage assessment differently for both assignments. For the letter to the editor assignment, half of the assessment derives from the ancillary materials. These may be graded as close to objectively as possible. The other half is given, in full, if the letter gets published. If the letter is rejected, students could choose a different newspaper and resubmit their letter. To get full credit, they need to provide a paper (no more than one page) indicating how they changed the letter for resubmission. Full credit is given upon proof of resubmission. For the public advocacy project, students created their own grading rubrics reflecting their desired outcomes and indicating what the instructor should see in a successful versus an unsuccessful performance. Consequently, out of a desire to be assessed favorably, the students identify the goals of their events and develop strategies to achieve those goals. As a grader of these assignments, the faculty member’s job is to ask whether or not the students met the goals set forth by themselves. In their individual self-assessments, students apply the same criteria that they created, hence providing a useful reminder that the assessment concerned the quality of content and implementation rather than personal political ideologies.

Democracy is indeed hard to love. It is also hard to teach. It is, however, worthy of both our love and our pedagogy.

Bibliography

1Iris Marion Young, Inclusion and Democracy, Oxford Political Theory (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 16.
**Some Thoughts on Assessment**

Most of the faculty stories that you have read were not intentionally written to explore and examine the role and place that assessment plays in learning. However, even if not explicitly mentioned, embedded within each individual piece readers can identify and see a faculty member’s philosophical and pedagogical points of view and the inter-relationship that assessment plays in supporting and encouraging student growth and knowledge acquisition.

Although the essential knowledge to be learned in each discipline may differ, some very common aspects of assessment emerge. For example, student conversation and discussion on a topic being explored, commonly called classroom “talk,” is a highly vital and valuable way of assessing the depth and degree of student learning. Whether we label the discussion as cooperative learning, problem solving, collaborative talk, or pair sharing, the goal and purpose is to have students negotiate the information presented in text, film, or lecture and build relevant meaning and personal understanding. Assessment is happening!

The faculty members involved in this eighth edition spent several sessions visiting and re-visiting each other’s manuscripts, and identifying elements of assessment that were evident, present, and essential. Many times, the breadth of the formal and informal assessing that transpires within the classroom structure is truly amazing.

We, the narrative writers, have attempted to synthesize for our readers a list of varied assessment tools, approaches, or methods found in these faculty stories. Although the tools, approaches, or methods may not be named, listed, or labeled directly in the written piece, numerous elements of assessment of student learning and of faculty teaching appear and are highly evident.

What follow are common and recurring assessment and evaluation aspects that were present in a variety of ways, and are highly interdisciplinary in nature.
ASSESSMENT TOOLS, APPROACHES, and STRATEGIES

- Formal term papers or projects
- Research projects and reports (with data collecting)
- Analysis reports
- Demonstrations
- Exams or tests
  - Mid-term
  - End of semester
  - Chapter Quizzes
- Formal essays
- Self-Evaluation responses
- Presentations in class
  - Individual
  - Group or team
  - Oral Interpretations
- Skill or technique “modeling”
- Student feedback & critiques
- Topical Mini-reports – oral or written
- Analysis and Synthesis activities
  - Drafting thinking questions
  - Crafting thesis statements
  - Questioning techniques
- Classroom discussion
  - Large Group
  - Small Group
  - Focus Groups
- Outlines and Note-taking (Notebooks)
- Problem-solution interaction
  - Large Group
  - Small Group
Focus Group

- Response logs or journals
- Rethinking assumptions (in various forms)
  - Point of View papers
  - Debates
  - Reflective essays
  - Panel presentations
- Power-point presentations
- Listening to student discourse
- Role-playing
- Personalized Comments
- Dramatizations
- Lab experiments and write-ups
- Visuals (including schema maps or models)
- Graphic Organizers
- Compositions (music, poetry, scripts)
- Student learning reflections
- Art Work
- Observations w/feedback
  - Student to Student
  - Professor to Students
- Active engagement – “hands on” activities

- Portfolios (composite or showcase)
- Portfolio exhibit items (discipline related)

- Anecdotal Notes (watching them in action)
- Rubrics (in various configurations)
- Checklists
- Workbook Problems with focus on:
  - Connecting old knowledge w/new
  - Problem sets
  - Application stories
- “I Learned” statements (i.e. Self-Assessment and Analysis)
- Reconfigurations (might need explained)